DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 428 877 PS 027 457

TITLE	Frontiers of Research on Children, Youth, and Families: The Development of Human Potential in the 21st Century. Opportunities at the Intersection of Families and Communities.
INSTITUTION	Institute of Medicine (NAS), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE	1998-00-00
NOTE	17p.; Photographs and text may not reproduce clearly.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS	Academic Achievement; *Adolescents; Behavior Problems; Black Youth; *Children; Community Resources; *Community Role; Extended Family; *Family (Sociological Unit); Intervention; Males; Neighborhoods; Prevention; Program Descriptions; *Public Policy; *Research Projects; Social Services; Welfare Recipients; Youth Problems
IDENTIFIERS	African Americans; Board on Children Youth and Families; Family Community Relationship; Policy Research

ABSTRACT

In 1997, the Board on Children, Youth, and Families launched the Frontiers of Research on Children, Youth, and Families Initiative to highlight recent policy-relevant research on children, youth, and families conducted by young and mid-career researchers. The initiative sought to encourage more sustained interactions between these researchers and policy makers, and to foster the development of young scholars who work at the intersection of science and public policy. This pamphlet describes the six research projects of the nine scholars: (1) "Multigenerational Coresidence and Welfare Policy" (Rachel Gordon); (2) "Neighborhoods, Families, and Children: Implications for Policy and Practice" (Margaret Caughy, Patricia O'Campo, and Anne Brodsky); (3) "The Lessons of Energy Express in West Virginia in Connecting Policy and Community" (Gretchen Butera and Van Dempsey); (4) "Promoting Academic Success and Preventing Disruptive Behavior Disorders through Community Partnership" (David Arnold); (5) "African-American Adolescent Males' Perceptions of Their Community Resources and Constraints" (Michael Cunningham); and (6) "Community-Based Interventions into Street Gang Activity" (Sudhir Venkatesh). (KB)

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FRONTIERS OF RESEARCH ON CHILDREN, YOUTH, AND FAMILIES

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THE DEVELOPMENT OF HUMA[illegible] IN THE 21ST CENTURY: OPPORTUNITIES AT THE INTERSECTION OF FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES

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Researchers in the United States are doing considerable work on a wide range of policy issues affecting children, youth, and families, from promising interventions during infancy to neighborhood assets for youth development. Although a number of opportunities exist for bringing the researchers conducting these studies together with the people who could best use the results of the research—state and federal legislators; policy and other decision makers at the federal, state, and local levels; and practitioners engaged in providing services to children, youth, and families—they tend to favor senior scholars. New investigators have substantially fewer opportunities to actively participate in policy discussions.

The Board on Children, Youth, and Families was created in 1993 to provide a national focal point for authoritative, nonpartisan analysis of child, youth, and family issues in the policy arena. Operating under the joint aegis of the National Research Council (NRC) and the Institute of Medicine (IOM), the Board is uniquely positioned to bring the collective knowledge and analytic tools of the behavioral, social, and health sciences to bear on the development of policies and programs for children and families.

One of the Board's primary goals is to bring cutting-edge, policy-relevant research to the attention of those who are most likely to benefit from it. The Board launched the Frontiers of Research on Children, Youth, and Families initiative in 1997 to highlight recent policy-relevant research on children, youth, and families by young and mid-career researchers; encourage more sustained interactions between these researchers and policy makers; and foster the development of young scholars who work at the intersection of science and public policy.

In mid-1997, applications were solicited on the theme, The Development of Human Potential in the 21st Century: Opportunities at the Intersection of Families and Communities. Applicants had to have received their advanced degrees within the last 15 years. Research was required to meet the high-quality standards of peer-reviewed journals in the field and have implications for policy, and applicants were expected to demonstrate a track record of scholarship in their field that reflects their post-degree work. Applications were encouraged from individuals and teams of researchers in diverse fields, including policy, economics, psychology, medicine and public health, law, social work, sociology, urban planning, and education, and from individuals in academic as well as non-academic settings.

Although it was not necessary for each application to include the following elements, priority was given to scientists whose research: spans the developmental continuum or is longitudinal; is interdisciplinary; highlights an assets—as opposed to a deficits—approach; is intervention based; and tests innovative methodological approaches, including blends of quantitative and qualitative methods. Special attention was given to research that promotes the participation of minorities (based on race, ethnicity, and gender) and that focuses on diverse populations, as well as to research that involves explicit collaboration among researchers, policy makers, and practitioners.

In May 1998, nine young and mid-career scholars whose research on children, youth, and families warrants the attention of national decision makers were named Frontiers awardees. Eight additional scholars received honorable mention. The awardees presented their findings at a symposium at the National Academy of Sciences that recognized their work as both exemplary on scientific grounds and relevant to policy. Among the topics: welfare reform, school achievement, intervention programs for low-income children, African American adolescent males, neighborhoods, and gangs.

This pamphlet describes each awardee's work in brief. The junior scholars' papers are being published in their entirety in a special issue of the Journal of Community Psychology. *Readers are encouraged to contact the awardees individually to obtain more information about their research; addresses and phone numbers of awardees and honorable mentions are included in this pamphlet.*

We are grateful to the Smith-Richardson Foundation for planning support for the Frontiers initiative, and to the Foundation for Child Development and the Ford Foundation for continuing program support for the project.

MULTIGENERATIONAL CORESIDENCE AND WELFARE POLICY

RACHEL A. GORDON
National Opinion Research Center and the University of Chicago

Rachel A. Gordon is a research scientist at the Alfred P. Sloan Center on Parents, Children, and Work of the National Opinion Research Center and the University of Chicago, and a statistician and research scientist in the Department of Psychiatry at the University of Chicago. She received her B.S. from Pennsylvania State University and her Ph.D. in public policy from the University of Chicago; she also holds a master of public policy from the University of Chicago. Gordon was a Chapin Hall/Harris School summer fellow in child and family policy, working with the Illinois Governor's Task Force on Human Services Reform.

Under welfare reform legislation enacted in 1996, unmarried, minor parents receiving welfare must live in adult-supervised settings, typically resulting in a multigenerational living arrangement. Proponents of this policy maintain that eligibility for welfare benefits may encourage teenage mothers to leave home before they are ready and that living at home can support young mothers' life progress. Research relevant to this policy—including studies of the prevalence, predictors, and consequences of the three-generation households that form when young mothers live with both their parents and their children—indicates that most minor parents lived with their parents prior to welfare reform and receipt of welfare benefits does not appear to have encouraged independent living. Consistent evidence suggests that teenage mothers achieve greater economic self-sufficiency when they live in three-generational households. However, they also exhibit poorer parenting skills and the effects on their children as well as their parents remain unknown. Future research and evaluation should include administrative records that allow identification of minor parent-child families in senior parents' households, developmental models that consider the age 18 turning point in the law, whole-family lenses that examine effects on grandparents and children as well as on minor mothers, and statistical models that account for the selection of teenage mothers into various living arrangements. In this way, working with state policy administrators, researchers can shed light on how teenage mothers' living arrangements affect their life trajectories and those of their kin.

Neighborhoods, Families, and Children: Implications for Policy and Practice

MARGARET O'BRIEN CAUGHY
University of Texas at Houston
PATRICIA O'CAMPO
Johns Hopkins University
and **ANNE E. BRODSKY**
University of Maryland

Margaret O'Brien Caughy is assistant professor at the University of Texas–Houston School of Public Health for the MPH Program at the University of Texas Southwestern-Dallas. At the time she was chosen as a Frontiers scholar, she was assistant scientist in the Department of Maternal and Child Health at the Johns Hopkins School of Hygiene and Public Health. She received her B.S. from Texas A&M University and her Sc.D. in maternal and child health from Johns Hopkins. Caughy was a Chenoweth-Pate Fellow in Maternal and Child Health at Johns Hopkins in 1991-1992 and took part in a Maternal and Child Health Training Fellowship there from 1989 to 1992.

Patricia O'Campo is associate professor in the Department of Maternal and Child Health at the Johns Hopkins School of Hygiene and Public Health. She received her B.S. from the University of California at Berkeley and her Ph.D. in epidemiology from Johns Hopkins. O'Campo is a recipient of the Young Professional Award from the American Public Health Association's Maternal and Child Health Section and the Outstanding Research Award of the National Perinatal Association. She is a principal investigator on six research grants and a co-investigator on nine research grants.

Anne E. Brodsky is assistant professor in the Department of Psychology at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County. She received her A.B. from Vassar College and her Ph.D. in clinical/community psychology from the University of Maryland, College Park. Brodsky has worked as a clinician with urban children, adolescents, and families in settings that include hospitals, residential treatment centers, residential foster care, community mental health centers, schools, and homes. She recently received honorable mention from the Society for Community Research and Action's Dissertation Award.

Recent global and national trends have put a growing number of U.S. families and children—many of whom live in poverty—at risk for adverse health and developmental outcomes. Much of the research that has tried to understand the processes by which poverty is translated into poor outcomes, as well as the policies and programs designed to address these problems, have too often focused on the characteristics of individuals as the root cause and have failed to significantly address core problems. These approaches are limiting because they place the complete burden of change on individuals, failing to address how larger structural issues contribute to urban residents' poor health in ways beyond individual control. Research suggests that researchers, program planners, and policy makers go beyond focusing on individuals to incorporate and target larger structural issues such as increasing poverty, growing economic inequalities between rich and poor, and eroding public social programs. Research also demonstrates the importance of larger social structures for individuals' health and has implications for policy, namely: Neighborhood economic and social processes influence residents' health and well-being directly and indirectly, and are thus important targets for intervention. In considering problems of the central city, policy makers must address the multiple social issues facing community residents and acknowledge and build on multiple indigenous community resources. One-size-fits-all approaches are limited in their ability to address problems of economically deprived urban areas since there is considerable variation within at-risk neighborhoods.

The Lessons of Energy Express in West Virginia in Connecting Policy and Community

GRETCHEN BUTERA *and* **VAN DEMPSEY**
West Virginia University

Gretchen Butera is associate professor of early intervention in the Department of Educational Theory and Practice at West Virginia University where, in 1996, she was named Outstanding Teacher of the Year. Butera received her B.S. from the University of Illinois and her Ph.D. in early childhood special education from the University of California at Santa Barbara. She has worked as a preschool teacher with disabled children and a child care worker and therapist.

Van Dempsey is associate professor, educational foundations, at West Virginia University. Dempsey received his B.A. and his Ph.D. from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He has worked as a social studies teacher and served as a member of numerous university task forces and committees addressing such issues as professional development, cultural diversity, and other school activities.

Compensatory programs that aim to reduce the negative effects of poverty on children and families often translate poorly in rural Appalachian communities, where geographic isolation and poverty can undermine intervention efforts. Intervention programs tend to be more successful when they acknowledge the social contexts and environments in which children and their families live, and take into account the distinct nature and characteristics of different low-income communities. Energy Express is a prime example of a project that connects policy implementation and community structures and goals. This summer program for low-income schoolchildren, sponsored by the West Virginia University Extension Service in collaboration with local, state, federal, and private partners, features nutritious meals, literacy-based activities, and parent and community involvement in 68 sites. In so doing, it provides a context for understanding policy issues as they relate to educating low-income children, demonstrating significant program effects on reading achievement, child motivation, and relationships between children and mentors. Part of the program's success can be traced to its use of an organizational strategy that connects communities to a program philosophy by building local teams of leaders, local sets of resources, and local contributions of community members' time, energy, and sense of volunteerism, and to its respect for the values of the Appalachian culture.

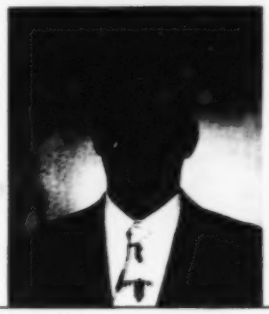
Promoting Academic Success and Preventing Disruptive Behavior Disorders Through Community Partnership

DAVID HARVEY ARNOLD
University of Massachusetts at Amherst

David Arnold is assistant professor of psychology at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. He received his B.A. from Dartmouth College and his Ph.D. in clinical psychology from the State University of New York at Stony Brook. Arnold received the University of Massachusetts Distinguished Teacher Award in 1997 and a National Institute of Mental Health FIRST Award in 1996. He serves on the editorial board of the Journal of Educational Psychology.

In communities across America, especially those that are disadvantaged, children who hate school, struggle academically, act out, and get in trouble are likely to experience even more significant problems later in their lives, such as school dropout, delinquency and crime, teenage pregnancy, substance abuse, and welfare dependence. Because academic difficulties and problem behaviors create a cycle in which each problem exacerbates the other, theory and research suggest that early intervention could be more successful if it targets not just academic skills and interest, but also behavior problems such as aggression, defiance, disruption, and antisocial behavior. The relationship between academic development and behavior problems begins early—sometimes as early as age 3—suggesting that programs to address these issues should start with young children. And research showing that children with behavior problems were less engaged in learning activities suggests that increasing academic interest could provide a key leverage point in addressing both academic and behavioral problems, helping children break out of the negative cycle of academic and behavior problems by directly facilitating their academic development and reducing aggressive behavior. An early intervention program in child care centers for low-income preschool children that promotes emergent preliteracy skills through shared reading while encouraging positive behavior promises to yield clues as to the role these approaches play in facilitating children's healthy development. The project also seeks to build a foundation of community members—including parents, teachers, and child care providers—to provide ongoing implementation of the program.

African-American Adolescent Males' Perceptions of Their Community Resources and Constraints



MICHAEL CUNNINGHAM
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Michael Cunningham is assistant professor in the Department of Psychology and African and African Diaspora Studies Program at Tulane University. He received his B.A. from Morehouse College and his Ph.D. in educational studies and psychology from Emory University. Prior to coming to Tulane, he was a faculty-in-residence and post-doctoral fellow at the University of Pennsylvania. He is a recipient of the National Collegiate Education Award and Morehouse College's Carnation Award in Teacher Excellence.

The media regularly report on young African-American males, from articles about their participation in urban crime to anecdotal accounts of young men who embark on risky life courses. However, research has lagged behind, with most studies targeting very young boys or young adults, leaving adolescent males largely unexamined. Adolescence is a critical transition point during which some teenage boys develop positive identities and engage in socially responsible behaviors, while others from similar backgrounds and neighborhoods become vulnerable to negative pressures. An investigation of African-American adolescent males' perceptions of their community resources and constraints, designed to better understand the developmental pathways of resilient and vulnerable teenagers, found that adolescent males hold high career and educational expectations, despite being aware of serious problems in their neighborhoods, such as drugs and violence, that others might expect to militate against positive life goals. The study also found that adolescent males communicate with parents and teachers—not just peers—when confronted with negative experiences, such as exposure to stabbings, fights, and discrimination. One mechanism the adolescents used to cope with such negative experiences, particularly discrimination, involved adopting inflated notions of male gender roles and degrading views of females, perhaps as a face-saving strategy. Young African-American males need significant adults at home, in schools, in churches, and in the community to help them interpret their behaviors and provide a supportive environment in which youth can experiment with their exaggerated idea of maleness. Future research should examine factors and support systems associated with young black males, as well as the developmental processes associated with high levels of perceived risk in African-American male adolescents' environments.

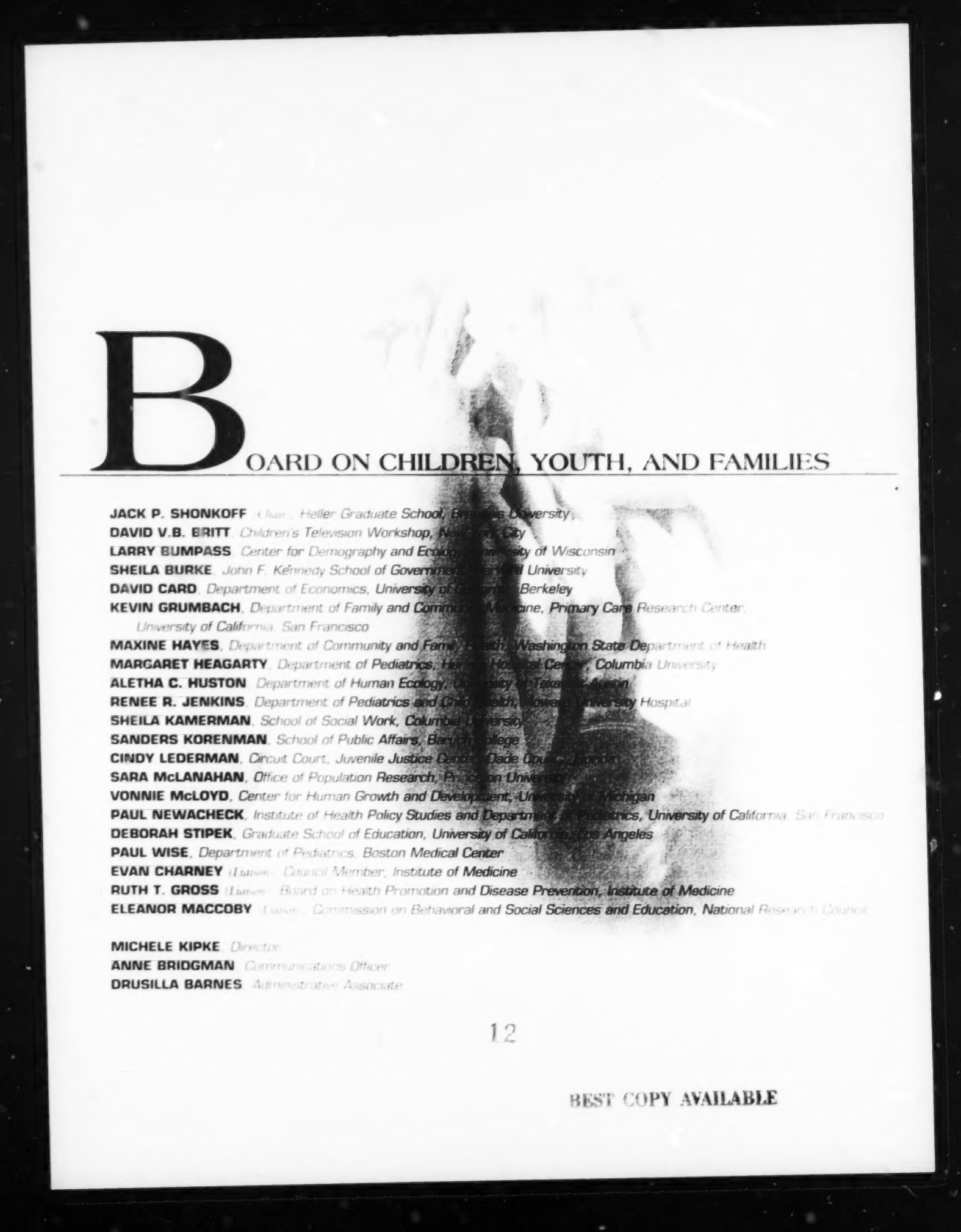
Community-Based Interventions Into Street Gang Activity

SUDHIR ALLADI VENKATESH
Harvard University

Sudhir Alladi Venkatesh is a junior fellow in the Society of Fellows at Harvard University. He received his B.A. from the University of California at San Diego and his Ph.D. in sociology from the University of Chicago. Venkatesh is the recipient of a Milton Fund Research Grant from the Medical School at Harvard University and a research grant from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation. He has served as a research consultant for the Chicago Community Trust's Youth and Families Initiative Project and as a research assistant for the Chicago Neighborhood Study.

The large urban street gang has changed significantly in the last decade, creating novel problems and challenges for communities. The most prominent shifts include a turn toward entrepreneurialism and a heightened use of violence; in addition, there has been greater organizational strength and the emergence of cross-ethnic alliances among Latino, African-American, and Asian-American gangs. To date, social policy has tended to rely on law enforcement approaches to curb gang activity, a strategy that has not yielded much success in either reducing criminality and violence or assisting communities besieged by gang-related problems. An examination of three community-based interventions in the Chicago metropolitan area that aim to respond to the modern-day practices of local street gangs finds that these interventions are unique in that each attempts to engage a range of community players, including social service agencies, churches, schools, and law-enforcement bureaus. They also seek to build on existing social networks to devise a bottom-up approach to street gang activity, for example, one that works through existing social networks and relationships as opposed to imposing a set of guidelines from the top down. An exploration of the strengths and weaknesses of these efforts can help inform our understanding of the relationship of gangs and communities and the means by which gang activity can better be addressed by research, policy, and practice. Such study can also highlight the potential of local community social organizations to serve as a foundation for street gang social policy design and implementation.

All photos of Frontiers scholars were taken by **Nancy Dubiell.**



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1998
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